



Jonathan Davies (ed.), *Aspects of violence in Renaissance Europe*, London : Ashgate, 2013, 276 p., ISBN 978-1409433415. Sanne Muurling

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- 1 While the big debates within the history of violence have largely been inspired by quantitative assessments of homicide rates, there has also been an increasing interest in the examination of violence as a cultural issue. This volume, edited by Jonathan Davies, is a recent contribution to this cultural approach to violence. It consists of nine essays from various disciplines, divided into the three sections (interpersonal violence, war and justice) that intend to shed light on the varieties of violent behavior that cannot be fully captured by homicide statistics alone.
- 2 The volume opens with a chapter by Hannah Skoda on student violence in 15th century Paris and Oxford. By primarily studying students' letters and poetry, it examines violence as a tool to engage with and manipulate the labels attached to the dichotomous stereotypical social identities of being a conscientious, pious learner versus a violent, drunken, and sexually uncontrolled deviant. In the analysis of four key aspects of student identity – peer groups, masculinity, geographical provenance and the relationship with townspeople – she shows the specificity of violent behavior. Skoda argues that the different institutional structures and specific demographic and political contexts are responsible for the variations in form and functions of violence in Paris and Oxford.
- 3 The second chapter by Joëlle Rollo-Koster consists of a cultural re-examination of the 1527 Sack of Rome. Rather than a political view focusing on the pope's failure to keep the European power-balance in check or a religious view that attributes the violence to the Lutherans and their anti-popery, Rollo-Koster embeds the Sack of Rome within the cultural framework of traditional interregnum violence that existed within Roman and papal culture. Based on historical events that preceded the Sack, such as the 1050 death

of a bishop and the 1378 papal election in Rome, she points at recurring elements such as looting, violence related to political dissatisfaction, and counter liturgy and carnivalesque behavior. She argues that the main offenders of the Sack, the Lutheran Landsknechte, drew upon a scripted tradition of customary violence that transcended confessional lines.

- 4 The 1546 murder of the Spanish Evangelical expatriate Juan Díaz by his Catholic brother Alfonso, a lawyer at the papal curia's highest court of appeal, is central in Miriam Hall Kirch's third chapter. Preceding the Schmalkaldic War between Charles V and the Lutheran Schmalkaldic league, it explains how the dissemination of reports and broadsheets of this murder that took place in Neuburg was shaped by the ambitions of Neuburg's prince, the exiled Ottheinrich. The Neuburg' government publicized their protests against Charles V's stopping of the prosecution of the Catholic killer. During the surrender of Neuburg by the Spanish emperor several months later, they used the murder again to draw a parallel between the murder of Juan Díaz for his evangelical beliefs and the refusal of Ottheinrich to abandon his Protestantism at the emperor's request, whipping up emotions against the emperor, foreigners and the Catholic establishment. Hall Kirch argues that the accounts of this murder should therefore be understood within this specific political context.
- 5 The last contribution provides a deeper reading of Claude de Rubys' 1577 *Discours sur la contagion de peste*. Within the context of France's sixteenth-century religious conflicts, it focuses on the religious and political agenda of this plague treatise and argues that it should be seen as a religious polemic that blurred the lines between civic healthcare and ritual purification. According to the treatise, the high Protestant mortality in the city of Lyon during the plague of 1576-1577 reflected God's sovereignty and the purging of blasphemous defilement that polluted the body of Christ. Deepening the categories of difference between Catholics and Huguenots, it provides a written record of the dehumanization of the Protestants of the city.
- 6 In the fifth chapter Alan James calls for a rethinking of the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 from a cultural perspective. According to James, the Peace is too often viewed as a watershed moment marking the birth of modern, sovereign nation states. Rather than measuring early-modern warfare against the rhetoric of the military revolution, he argues for an examination of the contemporary cultural values, motivations and strategic purposes of war such as dynasticism, legitimacy, religious conviction and personal honor and reputation.
- 7 That wars could also provide representational dilemma's for contemporaries is described in Sarah Covington's contribution on the literary representation of the English Civil War of 1642 to 1648. She describes a deviation from the traditional epic form of high poetry to a certain indeterminacy of the civil-war genres, responding to the violence with anything from silence, satire, factual documentary approaches, to a fascination with wounds. Covington explains the myriad of literary representations by pointing out that traditional literary forms did not fit the destructive realities of warfare 'at home' as experienced by contemporaries.
- 8 Marina Daiman sheds new light on painter Peter Paul Rubens' attitude to war. His allegorical depictions of war and peace, which focus on the horrific aspects of combat, have traditionally been interpreted as proving his pacifist intent. Based on Rubens' correspondence Daiman however argues that his views were more ambiguous. As a

person, he lamented war in his homeland, as a diplomat he worked for war in France and peace in the Netherlands, and as an artist he delighted in depicting war.

- 9 The volume's final section on justice is initiated by Lucien Faggion with an examination of new forms of social regulation and practices of conflict resolution in two Venetian 16th century rural communities. In the context of a rising number conflicts by the nobility, Faggion describes how a system emerged in which violent disputes between family or kin members had to be settled through the use of compromise. A mediator (often a notary) was delegated the responsibility to resolve these disputes, linking criminal and civil justice, and resulted in the writing up of deeds for compromise and peace acts. While research into law and legal practice traditionally tends to focus on civil or criminal court records, Faggion shows how the notarial archives can be used to gain insight into violence in urban and rural societies.
- 10 In the last contribution Amanda Madden examines the peace brokering process regarding the Bellencini-Fontana vendetta in late-sixteenth century Modena. She argues that factional violence may have been a less disruptive obstacle to efficient rule and civic life than has been presupposed and may in fact have been part of the 'functional politics' of governing elites. Regrettably the chapter does not explicitly provide arguments supporting this statement, but Madden seems to suggest that the duchy's need for cooperation of the nobility in the peace brokering and the peace enforcement provided a greater group cohesion that served both the centralizing interests of the duchy and those of the nobility pressured to subsume itself into ducal politics.
- 11 While individually the case-studies lack a shared, overarching focus, the collection does achieve what it sets out to do: illustrating the specificity of violent behavior and the need to contextualize it through a cultural lens. However, as this cultural approach has already been successfully pursued by other scholars for several decades (as is also indicated in the volume's introduction), it is regrettable that the volume does not address how the case-studies presented here alter or complement the outcomes of this existing body of literature, rather than primarily contrasting it with the dominant quantitative debates. The volume would furthermore have benefitted from a contribution on non-elites, since their involvement in and experiences of violence have traditionally been overlooked in scholarship in favor of the elites'. Nevertheless, this collection of case-studies succeeds in showing the importance of examining how, when and why violence occurred and what it meant within that specific context, above all illustrating the potency of a cultural analysis of violence.